

Small Town Essence at First Parish Church Fair

By TIFFANY FRANKE

"Fair" weather held out Saturday for what members of the First Parish Church boast the "oldest steadily running fair in the country."

Since 1851 the summer fair has been famous around the South Shore for its fresh strawberry shortcake, hidden treasures, roaring auction, and family activities. Cars were parked halfway down Depot Street and a traffic officer busily controlled the commotion at the Town Hall intersection generated by the event.

Fair chairwoman Laura Howerton said the most remarkable part of the fair are the volunteers who work together like "a well organized machine," allowing her to be the "glorified cheerleader," observing from the side. In chartreuse pants and a rainbow sleigh, she played the part with spirit.

Town members Nancy Ovaska and Jean Baker have been running the White Elephant tag sale for 14 years. Pat Slechta joined the effort six years ago. Together they sort through what they referred to as "treasure trash bric-a-brac," donations from townspeople and church members. They filter any antique valuables to the sale tables inside and sell the leftover odds and ends on the Church's front lawn.

One year they found a signed Parisian lithograph that was sold in the auction for over \$500. Each year they hold an informal contest looking for the "most unusual and unseemly" item in the piles. This year the winner was a clock with plastic turquoise numbers. Recently, a 20 by 30-foot orange shag carpet took the cake.

For her tenth year, congregation member Lisa Smith, aptly dressed in her strawberry apron, sold homemade strawberry shortcake, \$4 a plate. Fairgoers enjoyed a sweet serving with their hot dog or sau-



The red painted sign welcomed people from all over the South Shore to First Parish Church's 153rd annual summer fair.

sages as they settled in lawn chairs to watch the auction.

Auctioneer Lin Calista recently moved to Maine from Plymouth where she ran her antique shop "Cornucopia," but made a special effort to return for the fair. She and Eddy Saarella sold bookshelves, trunks, shutters, and even a windsurfer to participants. An antique London organ with side handles, made portable to travel between funerals, sold for \$175.

Live music on the lawn added to the festive atmosphere. Members of the Snug Harbor Chorus, led by Roy Kelley, sang to tunes played accompanied by keyboardists Gavin Hamilton and Greg Bray.

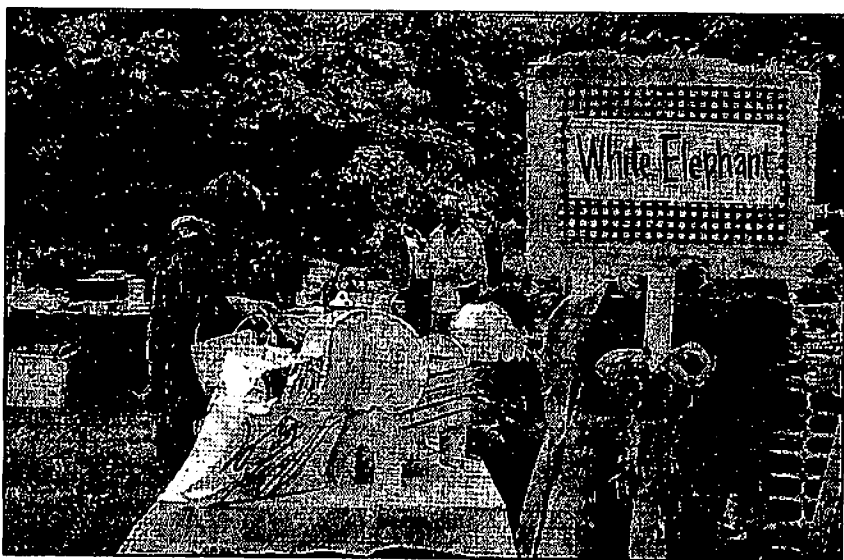
Nearby, volunteers sold colorful and exotic Guatemalan crafts from "Colores del Pueblo," a Texas based fair trade federation. Proceeds from the sales, which would be considerably less in the native country, go directly to the artisans, enabling their communities to prosper from the grassroots up and preserve native traditions.

Downstairs, palm reading, hair wraps, face painting and craft stations, provided entertainment for children. For her second year, DHS student Kira Treibergs dressed up in her mother's old shawls and transformed a downstairs room into a fantastical gypsy wagon to reveal fortunes. "It's a good time, a lot of fun," said fellow palm reader Genna Purcell. Outside, little girls with butterflies freshly painted on to their faces waited for their turn to jump in the inflatable moonwalk.

Whether having found a "hidden treasure" or indulged in a slice of homemade pie, fairgoers went home with the sweet sensation of small town life at its best.



For ten years Lisa Smith (middle) has been making her famous strawberry shortcake for the fair.



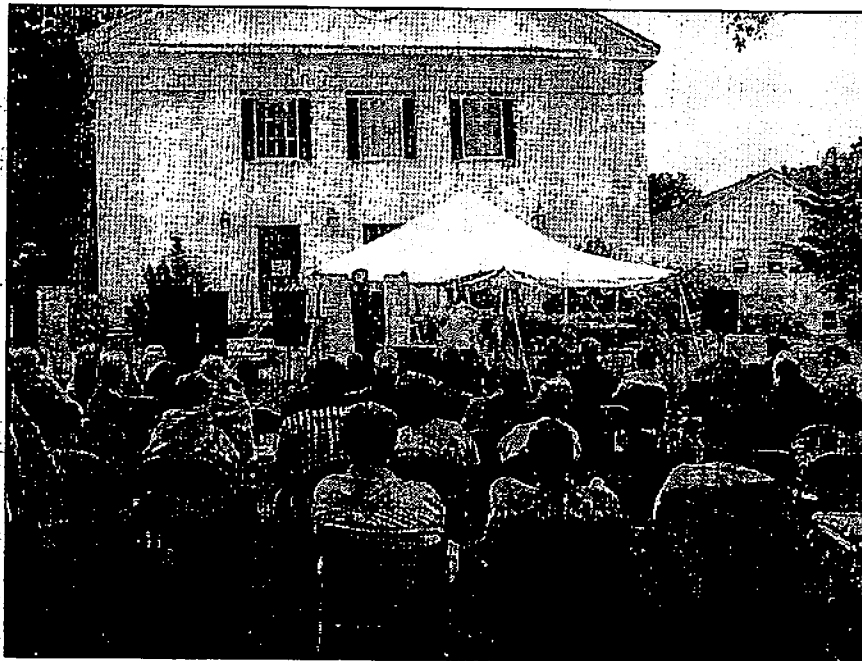
Fairgoers searched for treasures at White Elephant tag sale.



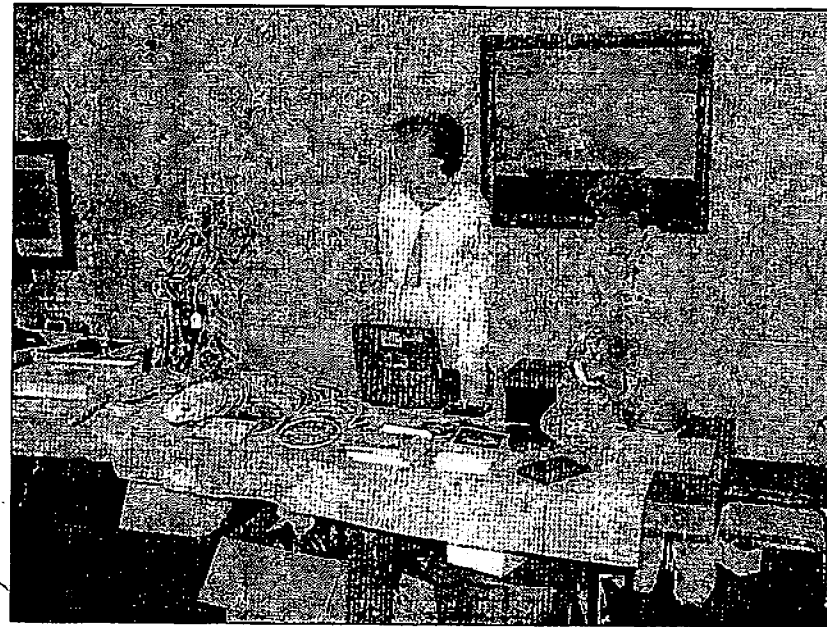
Palm readers Genna Purcell and Kira Treibergs posed in their aviator outfits.



Pat Slechta has been volunteering for the White Elephant tag sale for six years.



Auctioneers Lin Calista and Eddy Saarella tempted auction participants with bargain items.



Members from First Parish Church's ladies group, The Alliance, sold hand-woven crafts. Justine Fontine was in charge of the cash box.